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Bills establish arts committee

By CHANNING GRAY
Journal-Bulletin Arts Writer

PROVIDENCE — Two of three bills pertaining to the arts made it through the General Assembly and became law this past week.

One was the controversial proposal to establish a joint legislative committee on the arts, a bill that was vigorously opposed by the state Council on the Arts, which saw it as a threat. The other created a state film commission, designed to tout the Biggest Little State in the Union as the best place in the country to make movies. This passed with a \$49,000 appropriation.

The loser was a bill that would have extended the terms of two members of the state Council on the Arts, Phyllis Stanzler and George Bass. Under current law, members serve only two four-year

terms, but council chairman Daniel Lecht argued that with cuts in government arts money, the agency should hang onto experienced members. Apparently the General Assembly didn't buy it.

ORIGINALLY, the bill — co-sponsored by Democratic Representatives Jeffery Teitz of Newport and John Harwood of Pawtucket — would have extended Licht's term as well, but that language was trimmed from the bill before it left the House Judiciary Committee. It also allows the council chairman to recommend to the governor the dismissal of any member who doesn't attend half the agency's monthly meetings.

The bill setting up a legislative arts committee went through some revision, too. As originally introduced by Rep. Vito A. Saritelli, an East Side Democrat

and a member of a national legislative conference on the arts, the committee would have had the authority to oversee the spending of state arts money and would have established an 11-member advisory committee of artists and art lovers. Both provisions were stricken though, again because the arts council felt the bill was either duplicating its efforts or muscling in on its territory.

As it stands now, the commission is empowered simply to coordinate all governmental art programming and to develop ties between tourism and economic development and the state's cultural resources.

"I think it will be a tremendous boon to the arts in this state," Saritelli said last week, "and I think it will underscore to the general public how important the arts are."

Members of the arts council are taking a wait-and-see attitude.

FYI

Finally, the film commission. Sen. David R. Carlin Jr., the Newport Democrat who sponsored the bill and who will probably be commission chairman, said he hopes to have an executive director in place by September or October. Carlin said the commission's \$49,000 appropriation would pay the director's salary, probably a secretary's, as well as office expenses and a handbook listing goods and services movie producers might need while staying in Rhode Island, things such as car rental agencies, restaurants, and hotels. It would also pay for occasional trips to New York for the director, he said, and at least one trip to Hollywood to meet movie industry brass.

Carlin said he has already had a half-dozen offers from people interested in producing "very small things to full-length feature films" in Rhode Island. He said it is estimated that a full-length Hollywood-type film costs about

\$100,000 a day, and that 30 to 40 percent of that goes into the pockets of local merchants.

Carlin says he's been told by experts that Rhode Island is an ideal location for filming because of its "tremendous variety of backdrops" — places like Newport's Bellevue Avenue, Providence's historic College Hill, and Block Island.

IN FACT, Carlin has some first-hand proof. He was recently recruited as an extra for an ABC television segment on the history of the U.S. Open golf tournament, first played in Newport in 1895. Carlin, who once acted in summer stock, played a cigar-puffing golfer relaxing in the clubhouse after the match, and ended up "being very sick the following morning."

The good news is that the 90-second take, which took two days to film, left in its wake somewhere around \$20,000 for Newport businesses.